
2020

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“The Robbinsdale school district has now shut down schools for in-person learning due to COVID-19.”

My friends and I giggled and crossed our fingers as we listened to our teacher update us, hoping that the Minneapolis school district would be next. Back then we didn't know how serious the virus was, we just knew we'd get a break from school. It was my senior year of high school. At this point of the school year, I only looked forward to track season, club volleyball, prom, and graduation. Two weeks of no school was music to my ears. Little did I know those two weeks would turn into the rest of the school year. Leaving me with no sports, no senior activities, and in the house flipping through channels to different news reports about George Floyd's murder, riots, military reinforcements, and the constant update on COVID-19 deaths.

It was March 16th, 2020. I know this because my friend and I would take a picture every single day of the school year. On March 16th we took our last photo together in that school, and we didn't even know it. The staff at the time informed us that we would have no school for about two weeks until the virus had gotten under control. Most afterschool activities had been cancelled, but not track practice. My friends and I laughed and hugged, while yelling our good-byes for what we thought would be two weeks.

After that me and a few others headed to track practice. There was only four of us who showed up, while we were a team of about 30. Practice was awkward and short, and at the end my coach thanked us for still showing up despite the virus. Upon returning home I was relieved to get a nice break from school. Days went by and

things got worse. I started to realize just how serious COVID was, as deaths from the virus continued to skyrocket.

I remember sitting on the couch while my mom worked at the kitchen table; she too had been forced to stay home. While on a video call with one of her co-workers they spoke about school districts circling a choice to not allow in-person learning for the remainder of the school year and switch to online learning. All I could think about was the fact that I wouldn't be able to continue sports, finally go to prom, see my friends, and, most importantly, walk across the stage to receive my high school diploma that I've worked so hard to get.

Next thing I knew I was attending school online, not striving to get A's but to get a "P" for pass. My school had even changed the grading system, leaving me no possible way to raise my GPA the highest I could before I could make my final college decisions. Everything was different. I could feel the motivation leave my mind and body as I forced myself to open that stupid Chromebook everyday filled with random assignments my teachers had to throw together to make it possible to continue our education through online learning.

May 13th, 2020. My school organized a senior pick-up where we would go to the school, pick up our cap and gowns, diploma, a yearbook, a t-shirt, and take a photo. Unable to touch one another, staff and students teared up waving good-bye after receiving our graduate gifts and being asked to quickly leave before the room became too crowded. By this time there was a limit on how many people could be in one room, and how everyone needed to stay six feet apart.

May 25th, 2020. This was the day George Floyd was murdered. Everyone was glued to their phones or TVs as we listened to George Floyd yell, "I can't breathe". We watched as Floyd took his last breath, and his lifeless body being knelt on by an officer who swore to "serve and protect." The blood of millions started to

boil and just like that we watched our city burn to the ground. Our stores raided, buildings on fire, companies boarding up their property, our community had been destroyed. Protestors flooded the streets demanding justice as they were shot with rubber bullets, maced, and abused.

May 29th, 2020. It was now the day of my virtual graduation. My mother had planned to have family and friends over to drive by and drop off gifts or honk their horns. That didn't happen. Our city had just recently been put on a curfew, and no one really wanted to leave the house as we watched huge military tanks drive down our streets and soldiers stand on our corners with loaded guns. Finally, my name was called. I had finally graduated. Even though I knew I was supposed to be happy, I couldn't help but be sad with the state of our community . . . no, our world. Later that night on May 29th a local barber shop, two blocks from my house, was set on fire. Despite the curfew, the virus, and the military reinforcements, riots broke out again. Our community was angry, we wanted the world to know. So, the night of my graduation I watched the news. I watched my city burn again, just as I did nights before.

With a handful of stores and businesses closed due to the riots, there were only a select few stores that were still open. Walking through the empty isles, unable to find toilet paper, cleaning supplies, or medicine, you just had to buy what you could find. We got constant reminders of the lives lost to COVID, and even more videos surfaced of police brutality targeted at Black men and women. These murders in the name of the law were always around . . . it's just now they were being televised. Social media had given people of color a chance to show the world that still to this day we are being hunted like a deer in the woods. More people caught the virus, more Black men and women were murdered, and more people began to join in on the protest. It seemed like everyone was protesting for

something. Whether it was for justice, or the refusal to wear a mask, you were protesting for something.

If you're reading this now, I'm sure you know not too much has changed since the year 2020. It wasn't until April 20th, 2021, that George Floyd's murderer was convicted and soon sentenced to 22.5 years in prison. At the time it seemed like a huge win for the Black community but looking at it now, I think it was just a small sacrifice the system had to make to shut our city up for a while. There are still tons of innocent Black men and women being targeted and killed with no justice.

It is now May 17th, 2022. I just graduated from my two-year college institution . . . another virtual graduation. This time around I didn't even bother to attend. COVID is still very much a thing, no matter how much we as a society try to pretend it isn't. We now have a vaccination for COVID-19 and our government is trying to find every loophole they can to make it mandatory to get it. The virus is still around, the vaccination doesn't stop you from getting it, but the mask mandate has been lifted. Everyone has their own opinions and conspiracies about how we got into this pandemic or how it'll end, but for now I think we're all pretending to be alright.

This was my experience through all the heartache and struggle, and I'm sure everyone on this planet has their own experiences as well. We've lost people, we've lost experiences, we've lost time, we as human beings have lost for the past two years. We're all desperately trying to gain back what we've lost, but the harsh reality is that we can't. We will never get back what we've lost, but we can push forward in hopes of obtaining something that we didn't even know we needed.

At the very least we've survived this far. Through this long-lasting pandemic, through the police brutality, the injustice, the racism, the curfews, the military reinforcements, the riots, the lack of resources, we survived.